DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 128 735 CG 010 845

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TITLE Children and Broken Homes: Sources for the Teacher.
PUB DATE [75]
NOTE 10p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Annotated Bibliographies; Bibliographies; *Children; Childrens Books; *Divorce; Elementary School Students; *Emotional Adjustment; *Family Problems; Instructional Aids; *One Parent Family; Resource Materials; Teacher Attitudes; *Teacher Role

ABSTRACT

The depreciating attitude toward family life in our society has intensified in the past few years. It is not unusual to find substantial numbers of children in a first grade classroom who live in broken homes. Divorce is the answer for more young couples than ever before, and as a result the children involved must face growing up with a parent absent. A six or seven year old in such circumstances may come to believe that his situation is abnormal and that he is inferior to his classmates. This may create an emotional attitude which works against the normal learning process. A teacher properly prepared can counter this tendency be reassuring the pupil as to his acceptability and thereby enhance his receptivity to instruction. This annotated bibliography lists materials that provide an introduction to the problem, and insights into ways the young child may rise above his or her situation. They can be used by the teacher as classroom resources. (Author/NG)

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Children and Broken Homes:

Sources for the Teacher

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The depreciating attitude toward family life in our society has intensified in the past few years. It is not unusual to find substantial numbers of children in a first grade classroom who live in broken homes. Divorce is the answer for more young couples than ever before, and as a result the children involved must face growing up with a parent absent.

A six or seven year old in such circumstances may come to believe that his situation is abnormal and that he is inferior to his classmates. This may create an emotional attitude which works against the normal learning process. A teacher properly prepared can counter this tendency by reassuring the pupil as to his acceptability and thereby enhance his receptivity to instruction.

When a child tells about some "horrific" thing happening at home, it should be responded to calmly by the teacher. A little girl says, "My daddy scared us with a gun last night", or another girl says, "We moved to grandma's", or a little boy says, "My daddy came to visit. He beat up my mother. She's O.K., but she was crying a lot this morning." These are examples teachers may encounter today. A child looks at you with wide eyes until he sees a reaction of some kind. A teacher's attitude can mean a great deal; if the child sees a shocked reaction from his teacher, his trauma may worsen.

A teacher can help a child learn that he has an important place in the world, that he is important to parents even though they do not live together. When working with children of broken homes, teachers must consider the individual. We all know that each person is different from another and that reactions vary as do the circumstances. Sometimes it is difficult to help a child see that in a broken home he can still feel acceptance in the world surrounding him.

It is important to help children realize it is much better to be in a broken home than in a constantly unhappy home where both parents may be present. A teacher's effectiveness in dealing with children of broken homes can be increased by taking advantage of the perceptions and experiences of those who have analyzed and worked with this problem.

The following materials could provide an introduction to the problem and insights into ways the young child might rise above his situation. Hopefully, teachers will include some of the following materials in their classroom resources.

Adams, Florence. Mushy Eggs. Illus. Marilyn Hirsch. New York: Putnam's, 1973.

Two little boys live with their working mother. They lose a beloved baby-sitter. A family manages after divorce. The mother functions well and the children are cooperative and understanding.

Agle, Nan Hayden. Susan's Magic. Illus. Charles Robinson. New York: Seabury Press, 1973.

Susan's parents are divorced. Mother is weak and over-protective. Susan changes from being immature and selfish when she must do things for herself and think about others.

All About You (TV Series), The 21-inch Classroom. Distributed by Agency for Instructional Television, Bloomington, Indiana.

Louise emphasizes that no matter who the people are in the family, the fact that they are a family makes them different from any other group of people. She says family fights are soon forgotten, and the good feelings of loving and caring and sharing and sticking up for each other are the feelings that matter.

Berger, Terry. A Friend Can Help. Photos: Heinz Kluetmeier. Chicago: Childrens Press, 1974.

A young child whose parents do not live together acquires strength and self-esteem from her friendship with another little girl. Color photographs clearly reflect emotions.

Chorao, Kay. A Magic Eye for Ida. New York: Seabury Press, 1973.

Another situation caused by divorce. Ida must learn to be self-reliant and receive her own rewards from her own actions. Her mother, brother and friends begin to pay attention to her.

Eichler, Margaret. Martin's Father. Illus. Beverly Maginnis. Chapel Hill, N. C., Lollipop Power, 1971.

Martin lives with father. The mother image is absent. The story describes commonplace daily activities that the two engage in together. A gentle, matter-of-fact presentation.

Fisher, Aileen. My Mother and I. Illus. Kazue Mizumura. New York: Crowell, 1967.

A Read-aloud book in rhyme with emphasis on feelings.

Gardner, Richard A., M. D. The Boys and Girls About Divorce. Illus. Alfred Lowenheim. New York: Science House, 1970.

Helpful for parent conferences for younger children although recommended for children ages 12-up to read themselves, or with a parent. It discusses a child's feelings toward divorce, reactions toward working mothers and

stepparents, and provides practical suggestions for adjustments to new situations.

Goff, Beth. Where Is Daddy? Illus. Susan Perl. Boston: Beacon Press, 1969.

A little girl blames herself for her parents' divorce, and fears losing her mother after her daddy left. Gradually she learns to accept the situation. Parents will also find this book informative and useful.

Kindred, Wendy. Lucky Wilma. New York: Dial Press, 1973.

Wilma spends every Saturday happily with her daddy and yet enjoys returning home to her mother. A situation where a child need not be miserable because of parents' divorcing.

Lexau, Joan M. Emily and the Klunky Baby and the Next-Door Dog. Illus. Martha Alexander. New York: Dial Press, 1972.

Emily decided to run away and live with daddy after he moved out. Her adventures tell about a bad day that could happen to any child. The mother decides to set aside her own work to be attentive.

Lexau, Joan M. Me Day. Illus. Robert Weaver. New York: Dial Press: 1971.

On his birthday, Rafer wakes up looking forward to a "Me Day". He feels terrible because he misses his father. Finally he's sent on a mysterious errand. His father spends the day with him as a surprise.

Lexau, Joan M. Striped Ice Cream. Illus. John Wilson. New York: Scholastic Book Services, 1968.

Becky is miserable because she feels no one cares. Her parents are trying to get rid of her all the time. Somehow a striped dress brings happiness.

Mann, Peggy. My Dad Lives in a Downtown Motel. Illus. Richard Cuffaire. Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1973.

Joey's parents are getting a divorce and daddy moves to a hotel. Joey feels it is his fault, but finally he understands and learns to look forward to Sundays with dad.

Newfield, Marcia. A Book for Jodan. Illus. Diane deGroat. New York: Athenium, 1975.

Jodan was nine when her parents separated. She moved to California with her mother. Here is a situation common to many today. Jodan fears she is not loved and that she might be the cause of the divorce.

Not Together Any More. Understanding Changes in the Family Series. Pleasantville, New York: Guidance Associates, 1973.

A filmstrip in color and has a disc or cassette and a discussion guide. "Children often experience ambiguous feelings about parents, uncertainty about themselves, and grave doubts about the future of their families." Filmstrip emphasizes that children can't do anything to change a divorce and will only become frustrated if they try.

Rogers, Helen Spelman. Morris and His Brave Lion. Illus. Glo Coalson, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975.

Lonely for his father after his parents' divorce, a little boy thinks of bringing his father back to see him.

Schick, Eleanor. City in the Winter. New York: MacMillan, 1970.

Schools are shut because of a blizzard, and Jimmy has fun at school with grandmother while mother works. The family copes despite the absence of the father.

Stanek, Muriel. I Won't Go Without a Father. Illus. Eleanor Mill. Chicago: Albert Whitman & Co., 1972.

Steve has moments of jealousy and loneliness when he sees someone else with a father. Understanding grows that happy family relationships may encompass the greater family circle, and even friends and neighbors.

Surowiecki, Sandra Lucas. Joshua's Day. Chapel Hill, N. C.: Lollipop Power, 1972.

Joshua lives with his mother and goes to a day-care center while she works. She is managing well without a husband, and Joshua feels content.

Van Leeuwen, James. Too Hot For Ice Cream. Pictures by Martha Alexander. New York: Dial Press, 1974.

After Sara's plans to go swimming on the hottest day of the summer have to be cancelled, everything starts to go wrong.

What's a Family. Understanding Changes in the Family Series. Pleasantville, New York: Guidance Associates, 1973.

A filmstrip in color and has a disc or cassette and a discussion guide. "We strongly believe the family will continue to flourish as long as each child appreciates the important part this institution plays in his maturation and growth".

Zolotow, Charlotte. A Father Like That. Illus. Ben Shecter, New York: Harper & Row, 1971.

A small boy, left fatherless at a very young age, imagines what it would be like to have a father. The mother permits him to indulge in his fantasy.